

## **Equipping The Saints: Collaboration Instead of Altercation**

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**ABSTRACT.** There is a creative tension between qualitative and quantitative researchers which encompasses differences on a wide variety of topics. Perhaps the most concise overview of various aspects of this debate is contained in Smith (1994). Part of the national debate revolving around qualitative-quantitative evaluation centers on the topic of teacher-as-researcher (e.g., Sechrest, Winter 1993; Reichardt & Rallis, Spring 1994). The situation is no different in Florida. The 1992 special issue of the *Florida Journal of Educational Research* (Emihovich, 1992) has generated much comment. At least one such formal comment, and rejoinder, was printed in the 1993 issue (Davis, 1993; Emihovich & Students, 1993). These were followed by a symposium (Emihovich, 1993a) and an institute (Emihovich, 1993b). And recently, there was an article by Vitale and Romance (1994) in the latest issue of *FJER* which treated parts of this discourse. The purpose of this brief position paper is to present three perspectives of a person who has been trained in classical research methods, has read and received some training in qualitative research methods, and lives--daily--with the practical realities of holding a central office school board researcher/evaluator position.

There is a long history (perhaps some lore) as to the existence and rules of scholarly debate. Such debate, in my estimation, has provided and still can provide impetus to good theory formation and good implementation practices. For example, as part of the literature surrounding this debate, Shadish (1993) maintains that:

one of the more pressing needs in science is for the development of strategies that can uncover the biases of omission and commission that are inevitably present in all scientific methods and then ensure that they do not operate in the same direction in a study or in a research literature to yield a biased conclusion (p. 18).

My point here is not that there is a debate or even with the focus of much of the debate, but that the debaters keep to some acceptable high ground of discourse. I do not wish to see the rhetoric used by Clinchy (1994), albeit in another context, become a model

for this debate. Whatever the context, words/terms such as albatross, backward, quite irrelevant, and arrogant tend to get the attention of readers, but not their support. However, his "partially penitent response" (Clinchy, 1994a) is admirably done.

Unfortunately, Shadish (1993) captures the ambience of the debate and many, although not all, of the debaters:

To their deepest adversaries, quantitative evaluators are all logical positivists ignorant of modern philosophy using outmoded methods. To their most steadfast opponents, qualitative evaluators are soft-headed radical constructivists who deny the concepts of reality and truth and so unwittingly deny the truth of their own approach (p. 13).

I believe hyperbole and dramatic metaphors, as well as such words as absurd, delusion and affront--as used by Davis (1993) and Emihovich and Students (1993)--do little to enlighten. Rather, their use adds heat, when the opposite is needed; i.e., cooler words and heads need to prevail. The real irony is that both sides really do have much to say to the other; i.e. much substantial theory and practice to share. But shouting is not listening.

To be philosophically and internally consistent, I do not wish to be guilty of what I have just condemned. I also do not wish to be viewed as advocating an abandonment of well thought-out divergent positions. What I am advocating is the perspective that strongly held positions can be stated strongly and debated with much vigor, but must be without the loss of civility. What makes this absolutely essential is that public education and the practice of research/evaluation cannot be halted while the debate is completed and some "winner" announced. In the State of Florida alone, the discourse must proceed, unabated, while more than two million kids and tens of thousands of teachers show-up every day for school. For the sake of those students and staff, we who are engaged in this debate cannot afford to so pollute the atmosphere that it will not be livable for anyone.

Let me suggest a consideration of the following point made by Virkler (1981):

Our understanding of what we hear or read is usually spontaneous ... the rules by which we interpret meaning occur automatically and unconsciously. When something blocks that spontaneous understanding of the meaning, we become more aware of the processes we use to understand (for example, when translating from one language to another). Hermeneutics is essentially a codification of the processes we normally use at an unconscious level to understand the meaning of a communication. The more blocks to spontaneous understanding, the greater the need for hermeneutics (p.19).

Perhaps many of us who were trained in classical methodology are hearing a foreign language; and perhaps some (many?) of those trained in qualitative methods have little or no experience in what might be useful from classical methods. What usually is an unconscious understanding now will take conscious, focused effort on both our parts to

understand the other. Hopefully, we will not have to go so far as to develop our own set of hermeneutical principles for interpreting each other's literature. However, Virkler's point (even if made in an entirely different context) is still valid: i.e., if something is blocking our spontaneous understanding, then we need to become more aware of the processes we are using to understand and communicate.

### What the Debate is About

At its simplest level, the debate seems to focus on a blend of doctrine and methods. Some of this is reminiscent of the debate in past decades over applied versus real research and NRTs versus CRTs. Davis (1993) focuses on what I perceive to be the basic doctrine and methods of the classical experimentalists while Emihovich and Students (1993) respond with the basic doctrine and methods of the qualitativists.

Both Davis (1993) and Emihovich and Students (1993) make correct statements, and even seem to indicate some areas of possible agreement, but the possible agreements seem lost in the "battle" (an unfortunate metaphor). I suggest all researchers heed the observation of Reichardt and Rallis (1994): "Neither tradition has found the holy grail of research methods ..." (p. 10).

Davis (1993) points to the need to train teachers to be better observers (and I would add, recorders). And he is correct when he indicates this would not, in and of itself, make the teachers competent (my word) researchers. I expect Emihovich and her student colleagues would agree. And I am sure no one really is trying to make teachers highly trained statisticians. On the other hand, I suspect teachers may be able to state more possible variables affecting student learning than could many researchers (perhaps both quantitative and qualitative). I recommend Emihovich and Students' (1993) response entitled: The nature of research. Despite the unduly strong (in my opinion) rhetoric, I think there is much the "two sides" could agree upon.

It seems to me both sides recognize that, at best, only probability statements can be made as the result of either type of study. And I think both sides would agree that all events of importance cannot be replicated readily, or even at all. As McDowell and Stewart (1983) state:

When a judge charges a jury, he or she tells them to decide based on probability, not certainty; based on the evidence presented, not the certainty of having viewed the crime. If jury decisions were delayed until 100% certainty existed, no verdict would ever be rendered (p. 145).

We must admit the complexity of the focus of our research. Barth (1990) seems to ask some legitimate questions:

Under what instructional conditions does each child in a class seem to work best? And which of next year's teachers comes closest to providing those

conditions? To answer these two questions, teachers had to learn to observe each student in the class carefully. And they had to learn something beyond faculty room gossip about how their colleagues taught (p.60).

If we focused on those types of questions, it could lead to useful answers for students, regardless of the research methods used to obtain those answers. House (1994) observes:

Our obsession with the quantitative-qualitative dispute reflects our continued fixation on method. In fact, all research methods are everyday work tools, likely to get our hands dirty. Methodology is important, but it is no substitute for content. There is no guaranteed methodological path to the promised land. There is nothing mystical or transformative about methods of any kind (pp. 20-21).

Datta (1994), in creative fashion, also makes a good point about methods: "The third image is of three evaluators standing by an ocean whose life forms they seek to understand. The first evaluator holds a state-of-the-art rod with a big quantitative hook. The second evaluator holds a finely meshed qualitative net. And the third evaluator is a scuba diver" (p. 53).

Rossi's (1994) view is instructive:

Note that I do not contend that the one mode is better than the other. Both are valuable. Both are appropriate in the right circumstances. Both can be done very well or very poorly ... . Each approach is subject to abuse and corruption ... and each approach is bound to fail when applied in inappropriate circumstances (p. 34).

I agree with Rossi, and I agree with Waite (1993): "Blindly holding either oneself or another to a certain role restricts the resources and approaches that can be brought to bear on educational problems" (pp. 697-698). Therefore, as you might guess, I am an eclectic evaluator. Whatever works, quantitative and/or qualitative, is OK with me. This might be called the "mix-and-match" school of evaluation. What is wrong with that? Perhaps this indicates a need for collaboration and not altercation.

It seems to me that all of this gets at the real issue. What will work best in the evolving school settings of Florida students? Clearly Blueprint 2000 (The Florida Commission on Education Reform and Accountability, 1992) will be the springboard for radical and fundamental changes in these school settings. Consequently, there are many implications for the design, implementation, analyses, reporting, and utilization of research.

A clear example is the requirement that, "By the end of the 1995-96 school year, teachers will make judgements regarding performance of each student on two of the first

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four standards in Goal 3 of Blueprint 2000. Teachers will collect evidence to support or document their judgments" (Florida Commission on Education Reform and Accountability, 1994b, p.7).

The four standards in Goal 3 of Blueprint 2000 are:

1. Florida students locate, comprehend, interpret, evaluate, maintain, and apply information, concepts, and ideas found in literature, the arts, symbols, recordings, video and other graphic displays, and computer files in order to perform tasks and/or for enjoyment.
2. Florida students communicate in English and other languages using information, concepts, prose, symbols, reports, audio and video recordings, speeches, graphic displays, and computer-based programs.
3. Florida students use numeric operations and concepts to describe, analyze, disaggregate, communicate, and synthesize numeric data, and to identify and solve problems.
4. Florida students use creative thinking skills to generate new ideas, make the best decision, recognize and solve problems through reasoning, interpret symbolic data, and develop efficient techniques for lifelong learning (Florida Commission on Education Reform and Accountability, 1994a, pp. 26-28).

Clearly, it will take the utmost in collaboration among qualitative/quantitative researchers, university faculty, central/district office staff, school-based administrators and teachers to implement BP 2000 in a professionally defensible manner which will be "good for kids".

Maybe I am being too simplistic. Should not the focus be the relevant questions to be asked to assist school reform? Perhaps generalizability would be applicable almost solely to the classroom setting and not to other schools or school districts. In this way, the real issue of importance--the student's education--would drive the debate on research methods, and not the other way around.

### **Equipping the Saints is the Task**

Once you pass 50, it is much easier to recognize the truism that times do change. On the other hand, it may be a bit harder to make changes after you turn 50! But change we must. We are in the midst of a paradigm shift (Barker, 1993; Kaufman & Zahn, 1993). We in education--university, central office, school--cannot be loners anymore. We sorely need one another. More importantly, the students sorely need each of us. Jointly, we must provide the leadership which focuses on the improvement of the quality of these students' education through collaboration, cooperation, and empowerment; and not attempt this through altercation. As Schlechty (1990) points out (a bit negatively I think):

Business leaders have made such decisions not because they want democracy in the work place. Rather, they have begun to find out--in an environment where the application of knowledge and the ability to work with information are essential to the improvement of quality and productivity--those who have knowledge must be in a position to apply what they know. Thus encouraging worker involvement has less to do with truth, justice, and beauty than with the desire to increase productivity and quality (p. xvi).

We need to be facilitative leaders (Interaction Associates, 1988):

To confront these forces, it's increasingly critical for today's leaders to use all their available resources to their highest potential. A key resource, long under utilized, is the people in the organization. Teamwork is more important now than ever before if a leader is to gain the cooperation and commitment of various segments of the organization. To get today's employees committed and motivated, they must be involved. This requires sharing more information, decision making and responsibility. ... The facilitative leader achieves quality results through the maximum appropriate involvement of others (pp. 7-8).

This is not through frequent inspection, but continuous improvement. Not one shot; rather "quality becomes a way of life" (Kaufman & Zahn, 1993, p. 19).

The building principal or central office supervisor who resists restructuring and the empowerment of teachers on the grounds that teacher empowerment takes power away from their "bosses" is probably not a leader in the first place; but if these figures are to retain their power in restructured schools, they must learn to lead rather than to boss (Schlechty, 1990, p. 11).

From a practical point of view, we really have no choice. I do not foresee the availability of funds to staff universities and/or central offices with enough researchers, of whatever persuasion, to perform all the work necessary. From another point of view, what's happening in schools undergoing reform is too exciting to want to engage in research in any other fashion but cooperatively!

Even with collaboration, the implications are staggering. For instance, take staff development. Teachers (and others) need training in observation, recording, reality checking (e.g., am I, the teacher/researcher, putting too much of me into this study?), designing and doing case studies, interpretation of data from various sources, utilization of qualitative and quantitative data. "In my view, school reform cannot proceed far unless top leaders take their obligations as teachers much more seriously than is the case in many school districts today" (Schlechty, 1990, p. 100).

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The continuing education of teachers and administrators is, or should be, the responsibility of the employer, just as is the case with other corporate employers (including hospitals and law firms). Teachers and administrators should be expected to participate in continuing education because it is part of their job, not because it is a requirement to keep their certificates or licenses current (Schlechty, 1990, p. 143).

Schecter and Parkhurst (Winter 1993) discuss the use of teacher-research groups and make the following observation:

Teacher-research groups are excellent transformation vehicles for several reasons: First, they constitute zones where educators come into contact with one another under conditions of heightened reflexive activity; and second, they are social arenas with constellations of features that can serve to magnify differences and lead, in this manner, to productive professional catharses during which educators may reconsider their theories of teaching and learning. And because, according to our formulation of the social nature of thinking, when we as educators revise our theories of teaching and learning we necessarily revise our everyday relations in the classroom as well, to revise our ideologies is at once to alter the attending pedagogic practices. This, at any rate, represents our hope for the teacher-research movement as its power and influence continue to grow (p. 794).

Vitale and Romance (1994) do an outstanding job of relating a 5-year longitudinal school research project which really is a prototype model for cooperation/collaboration among researchers and teachers (and the professional growth of those teachers). Cole and Knowles (1993) have an excellent article on partnerships with teachers in the research process. They provide very useful charts to help guide these efforts; e.g., issues in teacher development partnership research (p. 481). And they make the following statement:

In contrast, new forms of partnership research are based on fundamental assumptions about the importance of mutuality in purpose, interpretation, and reporting, and about the potency of multiple perspectives. Also implicit in this model is the understanding that each partner in the inquiry process contributes particular and important expertise, and that the relationship between the classroom teacher and the university researcher, for example, is multifaceted and not powerfully hierarchical (p. 478).

Put differently by Joe Brannon, my Pastor and a former public school teacher, when we were discussing this position paper and the context of its use: "Equipping always involves giving the other person a chance to do something."

Let me attempt to state the problem in a unique, albeit very wordy, manner. Our [university, central office, private consultants] task is to prepare others [central staff, principals, members of School Advisory Committees, teachers, volunteers] for works of

research [qualitative-quantitative, formative-summative, formal-informal, theoretical-practical] so that the body of students [pre-school through post-secondary] may learn until they have each mastered [achieved, demonstrated proficiency] the high standards of Blueprint 2000 and have become mature enough [proficient, confident, competent] to attain the whole measure [satisfaction, rewards] of a full [healthy, happy] life.

How to operationalize this task of "equipping the saints for the work of service" would need to be the subject of other papers. Still, it seems only reasonable to provide at least a sample of examples of my thinking at this point. A qualitative and a quantitative researcher might develop jointly some rubrics for teachers to use in assessing student work products in student portfolios; or more expansively, develop some learning and assessment materials (perhaps multimedia) which could be used by school-based staff (or even SAC members) as they implement the dramatically changing classroom environments being brought about by BP 2000. Certainly the mandate that teachers must assess all 1995-96 students on 2 of the first 4 standards of Goal 3 "screams" for such efforts!

University and central office staff could cooperate to change undergraduate and/or graduate measurement and research courses to more clearly align with the requirements of BP 2000. *Teacher 2000* is one such initiative. It is a joint effort between the School Board of Sarasota County and the University of South Florida (Tampa) wherein an entire master's program for ESE teachers is being changed. Genesis is another initiative. This is at Florida Atlantic University, and bases undergraduate teacher education on BP 2000.

Summer Institute funds could be used to train school staff (and others) on "how to do" classroom-based research. These institutes could be taught by college/university staff, central staff, private consultants, (maybe even some previously trained school staff) or a combination. Creative use of video might allow "refresher" self-training during the year; perhaps even initial training on one's own time by those who could not take advantage of the Summer Institute.

Central and/or university staff could mentor school staff in the design/implementation/analyses/reporting of one or more research studies to a School Advisory Committee and/or the local School Board. There really is no reason why those being mentored could not be students working on real-life problems in the community.

These few examples are meant to indicate that we do have an obligation to "equip the saints," and that it is feasible to do so!

### Notes

An earlier draft of this paper formed the background for some comments made as part of: *But is it really research: Models for teacher-researchers*. Catherine Emihovich, Chair. A symposium at the 1993 Annual Meeting of the Florida Educational Research Association (Destin, FL).



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